

OFFER VERSUS SERVE (OVS)

in the School Breakfast Program (SBP)

OVS is a concept that applies to menu planning and the determination of reimbursable meals for grades K-12 in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) SBP and National School Lunch Program (NSLP), including the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP. It allows students to decline a certain number of food components in the meal and select the foods they prefer to eat, while reducing food cost and waste. OVS is optional at breakfast for all grades.





Overview of OVS at Breakfast

OVS applies to the **daily** meal pattern requirements. Schools must **offer** at least four food items. For a reimbursable breakfast, students must **select** at least three food items including ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitutions, if offered). The definition of food items and food components for breakfast is different from lunch. Food items are also credited differently at breakfast.

- A **food component** is one of the three food groups that comprise reimbursable breakfasts, including grains (with optional meat/meat alternates as grain substitutions), fruits (with optional vegetable substitutions), and milk.
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the three food components. It may contain one or more food components or more than one serving of the same component. For example, menu planners can choose to credit a 2 ounce equivalent (oz eq) whole-grain bagel (one food component) as two food items (two grains).

The chart below summarizes the daily meal pattern requirements and number of food items that students can decline under OVS at breakfast. These requirements apply to all grade groups.

OVS Requirements at Breakfast	
Must Offer at Least Four Food Items from Three Food Components ¹	Student Must Choose
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MILK, 1 cup² 2. FRUITS or optional vegetable substitutions, 1 cup 3. GRAINS, 1 oz eq 4. Additional food item from either FRUITS (including optional vegetable substitutions) or GRAINS (including meat/meat alternate substitutions) 	<p>At least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitution, if offered)</p> 
<p>¹ The serving size for each food item must be at least the minimum daily required quantities in the SBP meal pattern. The menu planner determines the daily serving size to meet the required weekly amounts for each component.</p> <p>² Schools must offer at least two different varieties (fat content and/or flavor) of unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk. Whole, reduced-fat (2%), and flavored low-fat milk cannot be served. The four food items cannot include two servings of milk.</p>	

For a breakfast to be reimbursable under OVS, schools must meet the criteria below.

- Meals must be planned to include at least four food items from the three food components (milk, fruits and grains). Menu planners can choose to substitute meat/meat alternates in place of grains after offering 1 oz eq of grain (minimum daily serving). Vegetables can be substituted for fruits if certain requirements are met. For information on the breakfast meal pattern, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals](#) and [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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- All planned food items must be offered to all students. The four food items can include two offerings of grains (either two of the same grain or two different grains) or two offerings of fruits, including optional vegetable substitutions (either two of the same fruit/vegetable or two different fruits/vegetables), but cannot include two offerings of milk.
- The planned serving sizes for all food items must be at least the minimum daily serving for each grade group. Larger amounts may be served if the weekly menu does not exceed the limits for calories, saturated fat, and sodium.
- Meals must be priced as a unit, i.e., students pay the same price regardless of whether they take three or more food items.
- Students must take at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitution, if offered) and the minimum daily serving of at least two other food items. Student selections of less than the minimum daily serving do not credit toward the reimbursable meal.
- If the menu offers the minimum daily grains requirement as two separate foods, students must take both to credit as one food item. For example, a breakfast menu provides the minimum daily 1 oz eq of grains from two $\frac{1}{2}$ -oz eq whole grain-rich mini muffins. Students must take both muffins to credit as one food item because one muffin is less than the minimum daily serving.



Crediting Food Items at Breakfast

OVS at breakfast is based on **food items** not food components. The examples below show how some menu offerings credit as food items at breakfast.

- A 2 oz eq whole-grain bagel is one food component (grains) that contains two food items (two grains). Menu planners could also choose to credit the bagel as one food item (one grain).
- A menu offering of $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup servings of blueberries, grapes, applesauce, and peaches is one food component (fruits) that contains four food items (four fruits).
- A school-made yogurt parfait made with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of low-fat yogurt, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sliced fresh fruit, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of whole-grain granola contains two food components (grains and fruit) that provide three food items. The yogurt is a meat/meat alternate planned as a grain substitution.



Menu planners choose how to credit fruits and grains in school breakfast menus. The USDA allows schools to make these decisions for maximum flexibility in menu planning.

- **Fruits:** A $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup serving of fruit can credit as one food item. A 1-cup serving of fruit can credit as either one or two food items. To encourage selection of reimbursable meals, it is generally advantageous for menu planners to credit 1 cup of fruit as two food items.
- **Grains and Meat/Meat Alternates Substitutions:** Foods that provide more than 1 oz eq can credit as more than one food item if the additional amount is the full 1 oz eq. For example, a whole-grain muffin or bagel containing 2 oz eq of grains can credit as two food items (two grains), and an omelet containing 2 oz eq of meat/meat alternates as grain substitutions can credit as two food items (two grains). Amounts less than 1 full oz eq do not credit for OVS. For example, a whole-grain muffin that contains $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq of grains credits as only one food item.



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Examples of OVS at Breakfast

For a reimbursable breakfast, students must select at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitution, if offered) and the minimum required serving of at least two other food items. The charts below show examples of OVS at breakfast.



Examples of OVS for All Grades					
BREAKFAST MENU		STUDENT SELECTIONS			REIMBURSABLE MEAL?
Planned Breakfast	Food Items	Student Selects	Food Items *	Includes at least ½ cup of F or V?	
			MUST BE AT LEAST TWO	MUST BE "YES"	
Whole-grain bagel, 2 ounces (2 oz eq)	2 G	Strawberries (1 F) Milk (1 M)	2	Yes	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 F and 1 M).
Strawberries, ½ cup Orange, ½ cup	1 F ¹ 1 F ¹	Bagel (2 G) Strawberries (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G and 1 F).
Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored milk or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk, 1 cup	1 Milk (M)	Bagel (2 G) Milk (1 M)	3	No	No. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G and 1 M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F.
		Strawberries (1 F) Orange (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 F and 1 M).
		Bagel (2 G) Orange (1 F) Milk (1 M)	4	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains four food items (2 G, 1 F, and 1 M).
Whole-wheat toast, 1-ounce slice	1 G	Toast (1 G) String cheese (1 G) Blueberries (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 F and 2 G including 1 from M/MA substitution).
Low-fat string cheese, 1 ounce ²	1 G	Toast (1 G) Blueberries (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G, 1 F, and 1 M).
Apple slices, ½ cup Blueberries, ½ cup	1 F ¹ 1 F ¹	Toast (1 G) String cheese (1 G) Milk (1 M)	3	No	No. The selected meal contains three food items (1 M and 2 G including 1 from M/MA substitution) but is missing at least ½ cup of F.
Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored milk or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk, 1 cup	1 M	String cheese (1 G) Apple slices (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G from M/MA substitution, 1 F and 1 M).
		Toast (1 G) Apple slices (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G, 1 F, and 1 M).
		Blueberries (1 F) Apple slices (1 F) String cheese (1 G)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 F and 1 G from M/MA substitution).

¹ Menu planners can choose to credit each ½-cup serving of fruit as one food item. Menu planners can also choose to credit 1 cup of the same fruit as two food items.

² This food item is a meat/meat alternate planned as a grain substitution.

OVS IN THE SBP, continued

Examples of OVS for All Grades, continued					
BREAKFAST MENU		STUDENT SELECTIONS			REIMBURSABLE MEAL?
Planned Breakfast	Food Items	Student Selects	Food Items *	Includes at least ½ cup of F or V?	
			MUST BE AT LEAST TWO	MUST BE "YES"	
CHOOSE UP TO 2 ¹ Whole-grain cereal flakes, 1 oz eq Whole-grain muffin, 1 oz eq Oatmeal, 1 oz eq Whole-grain toast, 1 oz eq Low-fat yogurt, 1 oz eq ² Cheese stick, 1 oz eq ² Peanut butter, 1 oz eq ² CHOOSE 2 FRUITS OR 1 FRUIT AND 1 JUICE ³ Applesauce, ½ cup Banana, ½ cup Peaches, ½ cup Apple, ½ cup Orange, ½ cup Blueberries, ½ cup 100 percent juice, ½ cup CHOOSE 1 Low-fat (1%) unflavored milk, 1 cup Fat-free flavored milk, 1 cup Fat-free unflavored milk, 1 cup	2 G	Yogurt, two servings (2 G) Blueberries (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G from M/MA substitutions and 1 F).
		Cheese sticks, two (2 G) Banana (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G from M/MA substitutions and 1 F).
		Cereal, two servings (2 G) Milk (1 M)	3	No	No. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G and 1 M) but is missing at least ½ cup of fruit.
	2 F	Yogurt (1 G) Cheese stick (1 G) Applesauce (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G from M/MA substitutions and 1 F).
		Oatmeal (1 G) Applesauce (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G, 1 F, and 1 M).
		Muffin (1 G) Orange (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (1 G, 1 F, and 1 M).
	1 M	Cereal (1 G) Yogurt (1 G) Blueberries (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G including 1 from M/MA substitution and 1 F).
		Bagel (1 G) Peanut butter (1 G) Juice (1 F)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 G including 1 from M/MA substitution and 1 F).
		Blueberries (1 F) Peaches (1 F) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes	Yes. The selected meal contains three food items (2 F and 1 M).
¹ This menu allows two choices from the grains component. Students can select two servings of the same grain or two different grains (including meat/meat alternate substitutions). ² This food item is a meat/meat alternate planned as a grain substitution. ³ This menu allows two choices from the fruits component. Students can select two servings of the same fruit (except for juice) or two different fruits. Menu planners can choose to credit each ½-cup serving of fruit as one food item.					



For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals](#) and the CSDE's [OVS](#) webpage, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103.

This handout is available at <http://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/OVS/OVSSBP.pdf>.

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